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ABSTRACT

This guide provides practical information for teachers and others working with students who have learning difficulties (such as learning or language disabilities) and for whom English is a second language. Emphasis is on productive instructional strategies and approaches. The book is based on results of focus groups comprised of practicing teachers as well as a review of the research literature on effective instructional practices with English-language learners. Following an introductory chapter, the underlying concepts of "comprehensible input" and "meaningful access to the general curriculum" are explained in the next two chapters. Chapter 4 addresses problems in trying to provide meaningful access through comprehensible input, whereas chapter 5 considers approaches to increasing meaningful access through comprehensible input. Chapter 6 focuses on the teaching of academic language and chapter 7 offers useful initial teaching strategies. The following chapter considers what teachers can do to provide meaningful access to the general curriculum. Chapter 9 offers specific strategies to build comprehension and other language abilities. The final chapter explains key instructional principles such as teacher "think alouds" and modeling, use of concrete examples to explain concepts, importance of consistent language, the need to balance cognitive and language demands, and the value of peers in language development. (Contains 54 references.) (DB)

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Guiding Principles and Examples from Research-Based Practice

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TEACHING ENGLISH-LANGUAGE LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Guiding Principles and Examples from Research-Based Practice

Russell Gersten
Scott K. Baker
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Eugene Research Institute
Eugene, Oregon

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Contents

1. **Introduction** 1

    Purpose 1
    Sources 4
    Organization 5

2. **What Is *Comprehensible Input*?** 7

3. **What Is *Meaningful Access* to the General Curriculum?** 11

4 **Problems in Trying to Provide *Meaningful Access* Through *Comprehensible Input*** 13

5. **Approaches to Increasing *Meaningful Access* Through *Comprehensible Input*** 15

6. **Teaching Academic Language** 17

7. **Useful Initial Teaching Strategies** 19

8. **What Teachers Can Do to Provide Meaningful Access to the General Curriculum** 23

9. **Strategies That Build Comprehension and Other Language Abilities** 29

    Selecting Vocabulary: What Words Should Serve as the Focus of a Lesson? 29
    What Are the Key Principles for Teaching Vocabulary? 33
    How Do Visual Organizers Connect Language and Key Concepts in the Curriculum? 36
    How Can Semantic Maps Enhance Knowledge of Vocabulary Concepts? 36
    How Can Story Maps Enhance Comprehension? 40
    What Is the KWL Procedure? 41
    How Can Visual Organizers Help Students Organize their Ideas? 44
    Summary 48

10. **Key Instructional Principles** 49

Teacher "Think Alouds" and Modeling Can Improve Second Language Acquisition. 49

Concrete Examples and Experiences Increase Student Understanding of Concepts. 50

Teachers Need to Use Consistent Language in Communicating Complex Concepts. 51

Teachers Must Balance Cognitive and Language Demands during Instruction. 51

Students Need Appropriate Feedback on their English-Language Mistakes. 52

Sufficient Time Should Be Allocated for English-Language Learning. 52

Peers Can Promote Language Use, Language Development, and Understanding of Complex Curriculum Content. 53

Current Policy Related to English-Language Learners 55

Review of Key Instructional Principles. 57

Suggested Readings 59

References 61

Appendix: Work Group Participants 65

1 Introduction

Purpose

This book provides practical information and guidelines to special education teachers, school psychologists, administrators, and program specialists working in districts or schools that have begun to provide services to students with a variety of learning difficulties for whom English is a second language. These students fall into four categories, including (a) students with learning disabilities, (b) students with language difficulties, (c) those who are at risk for developing significant learning difficulties, and (d) those who are receiving prereferral interventions. To simplify our discussion we use *learning difficulties* as an inclusive term to include children in the four categories.

The term *English-language learners (ELL)* may not be familiar to some educators. It is important that educators who work with English-language learners know the reason for using this more accurate term for the population being addressed. This new term replaces terms still in current use such as *Limited English Proficiency (LEP)* and *English as a Second Language (ESL)*. The term *English-language learners* is preferred because it draws attention to the instructional needs of students. In addition, *ELL* puts the focus on learners' potential instead of their deficits.

Many educators who are unable to speak the students' native language are baffled by how to provide high-quality instruction to English-language learners with learning difficulties. However, there are many effective strategies and procedures to provide

high-quality instructional opportunities for these students, *even when the teacher does not speak the student's native language.*

The impetus for this book arises out of the large amount of confusion and misinformation on this subject. In it we focus on issues related to *productive instructional strategies and approaches.* We emphasize approaches that seem to be promising for English-language learners who are experiencing difficulty in school. The book is intended primarily for school districts with relatively little experience educating English-language learners with learning difficulties; however, we believe that many of the guidelines and tips also will be valuable for districts with more experience in educating these students.

The teaching strategies outlined here are crucial for teachers with special education students in their classrooms who have been "graduated" from a specialized program for English-language learners but may still need support in English-language use. The learning challenge facing English-language learners with learning difficulties is great. Not only must these students learn age-appropriate academic content in a wide array of curricular areas, but they also must learn to speak, listen, read, and write in a second language. The double demands of doing both at the same time in the context of coping with learning difficulties are often daunting for both students and educators.

While there are some commonalities between the needs of English-language learners and students with learning disabilities, English-language learners also have instructional needs that are different from those of native English speakers with learning disabilities. For example, control of vocabulary during instruction is very important for English-language learners, but it is not necessarily important for native English speakers. Also, opportunities to verbalize thoughts are crucial for English-language learners. Essentially, the learning challenge for second-language learners is fundamentally different than it is for monolingual students.

Developing a program of effective instructional practices is no small task. In the process of developing this book, we have gleaned ideas about productive practice from teachers, researchers, and administrators throughout the country. The suggestions we provide are merely examples of tools teachers can use. District staff will need to understand the critical issues and

the key principles that underlie promising practices. The next step is the selection or development of curricula and instructional approaches that take these principles into account.

Our goal is to reveal principles that underlie high-quality instruction for English-language learners with learning difficulties, regardless of the students' official "label." We present several instructional strategies that exemplify these basic principles.

The principles we present, and the strategies we discuss to illustrate them, will be recognizable even to teachers with little experience working with English-language learners with learning difficulties. We believe that effective instruction may not have as much to do with modifying, adapting, and reconceptualizing *unique* teaching strategies and approaches as it does with using *familiar* strategies and approaches in ways that meet the language and learning needs of these learners.

Rather than providing a list of step-by-step instructional procedures and materials, we believe it is more useful to present a cohesive framework of the underlying learning, language, and cultural principles on which a vast array of specific and potentially appropriate instructional procedures may rest. In this way, greater flexibility can be achieved in teaching a broad range of school-age English-language learners with learning difficulties. This flexibility is especially important because there is considerable variability among English-language learners with learning difficulties in their previous experiences with English and with learning in structured contexts such as schools. This variability cuts across student age, grade level, and subject area.

Although the principles we present cut across grade levels and subjects, they are especially appropriate for English-language learners with learning difficulties in kindergarten through eighth grade. The examples offered come from materials used in classroom research studies, from classrooms observed by the research team, or from the experiences of expert teachers.

The principles contained in this book do not relate directly to the question of which language of instruction is best for English-language learners with learning difficulties. The question of whether instruction should be in the student's native language or in English is not a central issue here. Pragmatically, however, we do believe that it is vitally important to address one undeniable

reality. Regardless of educators' position on the preferred language of instruction, there are not enough trained bilingual educators to meet the increasing number and diversity of English-language learners with learning difficulties. Furthermore, this shortage will not be alleviated soon. More and more general education teachers will become teachers of English-language learners with learning difficulties by default, regardless of whether they know a word of Spanish, Hmong, Farsi, or any other of the literally hundreds of native languages of children in classrooms across the country.

Sources

We have relied on two sources in the development of this book. Central findings from each of these sources have been integrated to arrive at the underlying principles and guidelines we discuss. We believe this integration represents the foundation for the development of sound instructional practices that can be used with English-language learners who have learning difficulties.

Our first source is research literature related directly to effective instructional practices with English-language learners who are considered at risk for learning difficulties. Because the knowledge base in this area is just beginning to emerge, however (actual "proven practices" as well as promising practices that have received empirical support are limited), this literature represents only a portion of our source material.

Another source of information is less traditional. Following our initial examination of the literature on effective instructional practices with English-language learners, we conducted a series of focus groups to gather input from practicing teachers in the areas of bilingual education, special education, bilingual special education, and general education and from administrators, school psychologists, researchers, and teacher educators throughout the United States. These individuals helped write the book. For example, one group drafted an outline for the book, and then subsequent groups responded to the framework and the working hypotheses/propositions generated from earlier meetings.[1]

[1] Two of the five work groups were supported by Project Forum of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), funded by the Office of Special Education Programs, Department of Education.

The information we gleaned from the six focus group interviews resulted in continuous refinement of the framework utilized and ultimately a sense of what the field views as current problems and promising practices. Many of the educators who engaged in this process are listed in the Appendix.

Organization

The remainder of this book is divided into three major sections. Chapters 2 through 8 highlight several guiding principles of effective instruction for English-language learners with learning difficulties. In this section the concepts of *comprehensible input* and *meaningful access to the general curriculum* are discussed, as well as barriers and useful approaches for achieving these important goals. Chapter 9 discusses how to select vocabulary for instruction and then focuses on several strategies that build comprehension and language abilities. Chapter 10 highlights several key instructional principles for English-language learners with learning difficulties. A list of Suggested Readings is provided at the end.

2 What Is *Comprehensible Input*?

A critical concept for second-language development for students with and without learning difficulties is *comprehensible input*. Comprehensible input means that students should be able to understand the essence of what is being said or presented to them. This does not mean, however, that teachers must use only words students understand. In fact, instruction can be incomprehensible even when students know *all* of the words. Krashen (1982) posited that students learn a new language best when they receive input that is just a bit more difficult than they can easily understand. In other words, students may understand most, but not all, words the teacher is using. Making teacher talk comprehensible to students goes beyond the choice of vocabulary and involves presentation of background and context, explanation and rewording of unclear content, and the use of effective techniques such as graphic organizers. By using context or visual cues, or by asking for clarification, students enhance their knowledge of English. When input is comprehensible, students understand most aspects of what is required for learning, and the learning experience pushes them to further understanding.

Comprehensible input means that students [are] able to understand the essence of what is being said or presented to them.

One way teachers can ensure that material is sufficiently comprehensible is to provide relevant background knowledge and content. Teachers should try to explain ideas or concepts several times using slight variations in terminology and examples.

... provide relevant background knowledge and content.

Yates and Ortiz (1991) stressed the importance of comprehensible input this way:

> It is difficult for English-language learners with learning disabilities to respond appropriately when discussions revolve around leprechauns, blarney stones, and the joys of eating corned beef and cabbage if they have no prior experience with these topics. The principle of comprehensible input . . . is violated when teachers use topics, materials and tasks that are linguistically, experientially and culturally unrelated to students' backgrounds (pp. 15–16).

As explained in August and Hakuta (1998):

> Comprehensible input might be equated with adjustments similar to those parents make when talking with young children, such as organizing talk around visible referents, using gestures, using simple syntax, producing many repetitions and paraphrases, speaking slowly and clearly, checking often for comprehension, and expanding on and extending topics introduced by the learner (p. 41).

Comprehensible input is related to more than just language development and curriculum content. Appropriate context is crucial. One way for teachers to be sensitive to the language and cultural backgrounds of their English-language learners with learning difficulties is to provide instruction that draws on the experiences of their students. This does not mean that teachers have to be experts in their students' cultures, but they do have to understand how effective it can be to connect students' learning to their past experiences. Such understanding can often be gained by listening carefully and attentively to students.

Provide instruction that draws on students' experiences.

Many other techniques can be used to increase the likelihood that students will understand what is being said to them, such as the use of consistent language, frequent use of visuals, and providing frequent opportunities for students to express their ideas. Comprehensible instruction requires that teachers carefully control their vocabulary and use graphic organizers, concrete objects, and gestures when possible to enhance understanding. It is important to limit the length and number of lecture-type presentations. During instructional dialogs, the focus should be primarily on accuracy of content, not rigid requirements associated with correct language use. Spending time defining, discussing, and clarifying vocabulary words unlikely to be familiar to the students prior to reading a passage demonstrated consistently positive effects on reading fluency, accuracy, and comprehension for students with learning, speech, and language disabilities (Rousseau, Tam, & Ramnarain, 1993).

To continually modulate and clarify the language of instruction, teaching must also be highly interactive. Teachers must constantly involve students, ask many questions, and encourage students to express their ideas and thoughts in the new language. Baca and Cervantes (1989) noted that a major impediment to second-language learning is fear of failure. They stated, "A lack of self-confidence or self-esteem will prevent students from acquiring a second language. They need to feel confident enough to take the risk of making mistakes" (p. 111). Similarly, Wong-Fillmore and Valadez (1986) noted that willingness to take risks is an important feature of language acquisition. One strategy for motivating students is to give them opportunities to share about their language, culture, country, and experiences. Opportunities to use language orally creates, in turn, opportunities to increase receptive language skills.

A major impediment to second-language learning is fear of failure.

Students need to be given more opportunities in the classroom to use oral language and to engage in cognitively challenging tasks. We believe cooperative learning and peer tutoring strategies have the potential to effectively and rapidly increase English-language development, particularly when working with highly decontextualized language concepts with high degrees of cognitive challenge. For example, in a study with middle-school English-language learners with learning disabilities Klingner and Vaughn (1996) demonstrated the beneficial effects of these strategies on learning outcomes. In addition, teachers in that study were encouraged to use the students' native language during the discussion and application phases of instruction. Such strategic use of the native language will help balance the tension between conceptual and language complexities and reduce the demand of levels of language complexity necessary to concurrently develop higher-order thinking skills.

... cooperative learning and peer tutoring strategies [can] effectively and rapidly increase English-language development.

For older students, expressing ideas orally can be risky in some classrooms. The use of dialog journals, even computer journals, with feedback from the teacher, can become a comfortable vehicle for English language development. Figure 2.1 provides journal entries of two English-language learners focusing on a gift they received from an important person in their lives.

Many teachers would reject these examples for reasons of grammar and spelling. However, both examples communicate

Figure 2.1
Examples of Journal Entries

Sergio	*Raul*
In the last two years I went to Mexico and my grandma dies and she was 86 years old. She gave me a fotograf. Every time when I remember her I get the picture and I see it. That makes me feel like she is right ther but she ain't. She used to play with me. I mis her so much.	One day my grandpa was going to die. I felt so sad. Before he dies he told my brothers and me t line up because he was going to give us a surprise. I got a cap and money and my brothers go money I mis him.

(*Note.* From Saunders, O'Brien, Lennon, and McLean, 1998. © by Wadsworth Publishing. Reprinted with permission.)

effectively about experiences that are meaningful to the writer. In conclusion, it is important to realize that comprehensible input is as much an ideal as it is an achievable reality. In teaching English-language learners with learning difficulties, we can attempt to reach this ideal level of support and challenge, but in the context of complex and fast-paced classroom interactions, it may rarely be achieved to the level we would like. Nonetheless, this is a critical principle as we develop an instructional program for each English-language learner.

3 What Is *Meaningful Access* to the General Curriculum?

The purpose of providing comprehensible input to English-language learners with learning difficulties is to ensure that they have meaningful access to the general curriculum. In essence, this means that students are entitled to instruction that deals with grade-appropriate content, concepts, and skills. In fact, amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 strengthened the importance of meaningful access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities, including English-language learners.

What, then, is meaningful curriculum access for an English-language learner with learning difficulties? Two examples may help to clarify the meaning of this concept.[1]

- *If students in a particular district are learning about the weather in grade four, then English-language learners with learning difficulties in grade four should be learning the key concepts about the weather.*

This may or may not mean that these students use the typical fourth-grade science text. English-language learners need to be explicitly taught how to access grade-level texts, and the materials may require adaptation to meet the students' needs. It does mean that these students receive something extra to ensure that they learn the key principles in that unit of fourth-grade science.

[1] These examples were developed in the course of a NASDSE Forum with input from the Office for Civil Rights (OCR).

- *If learning about character clues and character motivation in a novel is a major district objective for grade six, then these students should be reading novels, being taught how to detect character clues, and being given opportunities to write about character clues.*

The novel may be at a lower than sixth-grade readability, if this fits the students' current English-language reading ability. However, the novel should contain engaging characters with interesting motives and clues as to reasons for the decisions they make. In this way, the concept of character motivation is taught to these students in a way that is comprehensible to them.

4 Problems in Trying to Provide *Meaningful Access* Through *Comprehensible Input*

The most common problem in providing meaningful access to the curriculum has been the practice of viewing English-language learners with learning difficulties as simply low-performing native English speakers (Baca & Almanza, 1991; Yates & Ortiz, 1991). It is critical that teachers avoid this reaction when confronted with students who do not use English proficiently. In thinking about curriculum access, the important goal is that students understand the critical concepts being presented, rather than knowing the correct English label for a particular concept.

One educator described what it was like to come to the United States knowing very little English and suddenly change from perceiving herself as a "smart" person to someone with many academic problems. This perception remained private, because there was no opportunity to share it with anyone else. She believes it would have been enormously helpful to hear from other students about these same kinds of feelings—to understand that these feelings were normal and that the difficulties were an understandable reaction to learning in a new language and environment.

The unfortunate consequence of viewing English-language learners as having limited ability is the tendency to merely adopt watered-down versions of the standard curriculum, a practice that is in clear conflict with curriculum access. A second-rate curriculum denies English-language learners access to high-quality instruction and, ultimately, real academic opportunity. In thinking

about potential solutions and remedies, it is important to remember that there is no one right way, and currently there are no experts who have precise remedies. Nevertheless, we are making rapid advances in this area, and some promising practices are emerging. At the heart of these practices is a clear recognition that English-language learners with learning difficulties face unique learning challenges that demand innovative practices.

In the next chapter, we will describe some techniques and tools for reaching the ambitious goal of providing meaningful access to the core curriculum for all English-language learners with learning difficulties. It is important to note that, at times, best practice may involve reading some books in English that are below grade level in order to meet specific instructional objectives. Whatever the level of the text, however, these students must not be denied meaningful instruction in appropriate grade-level core concepts in literature, social studies, mathematics, and science.

5 Approaches to Increasing *Meaningful Access* Through *Comprehensible Input*

Providing curriculum access does not absolve districts of their responsibility to teach students how to read and develop other core academic abilities and skills in areas such as mathematics, writing, and the use of technology. This means that below-grade material can be used if doing so better assists students in learning a core academic objective. For example, with the objective of focusing on character clues in literature, it is not necessary for all English-language learners with learning difficulties in grade six to use a novel that is used for native-English-speaking sixth graders. The novel could be a good piece of literature at a fourth-grade readability level that is used to learn the same analytical skills related to identification of character clues. (It could also be a novel written in the student's native language.)

The crucial point is that teaching all students, including English-language learners with learning difficulties, how to read and understand what they read is essential. Although not all of an English-language learner's time has to be spent on grade-level material, access to the key grade-level concepts in the curriculum is essential.

A potentially useful approach for increasing access to the general curriculum is the use of *cooperative learning strategies* and *peer tutoring*. In these contexts, English-language learners with learning difficulties can, in small groups, work on important learning objectives. For example, use of cooperative learning strategies and peer tutoring significantly increased the reading

comprehension on English-language texts of seventh- and eighth-grade English-language learners with learning disabilities (Klingner & Vaughn, 1996). Interestingly, although the text was read in English and the discussions were conducted primarily in English, students were encouraged to converse with each other in Spanish if they felt that doing so would increase their understanding of the material. In a sense, students can "pool" their language skills to describe concepts, define words, and provide examples to each other. Similarly, use of a tutor who speaks the child's native language to explain key concepts and clarify any difficult points can increase an English-language learner's access to important content-area information. This tutor can be a paid paraprofessional, a parent volunteer, a community member, or an older student. It is important to note that instructional options that include tutors and paraprofessionals should not replace teacher–student interactions and instruction.

Inexperienced teachers frequently turn over the bulk of instructional responsibilities to others and provide insufficient monitoring of the learning that takes place. It is always the classroom teacher's responsibility to ensure that high quality instruction is provided to English-language learners and that they are learning appropriate curriculum objectives.

6 Teaching Academic Language

Successful educators of English-language learners who are particularly effective with students with learning difficulties understand that demonstrating language proficiency depends heavily on contextual factors. Hakuta and Snow (1986) made the point this way: "Language is not a unified skill but a complex configuration of abilities. Language used for conversational purposes is quite different from language used for school learning" (p. 89). This distinction is a critical one for classroom teachers working with English-language learners with learning difficulties.

Language used for conversational purposes is quite different from language used for school learning.

Basic interpersonal communication skills are often called *conversational language*. The formal language used in academic dialog is referred to as *academic language* (Echevarria & Graves, 1998). Basic interpersonal communication can be thought of as the language of the playground, or the language for talking to friends. It is "heavily dependent on clues, on visual gestures, conversational responses, and short, partially grammatical phrases" (Hakuta & Snow, 1986). Moreover, it is very different from the formal language used in academic contexts such as explaining scientific concepts and articulating themes in novels. Many have found these distinctions, first articulated by Cummins, important in understanding why students who seem to speak English fairly well in their conversations with peers still struggle with reading textbooks or sophisticated novels in English (Cummins, 1981).

Increasingly, many argue that academic language development in English should be a crucial instructional objective of

Reinforce verbal exchanges with written words.

schooling for English-language learners beginning in kindergarten (Collier, 1995; Cummins, 1981). In fact, for English-language learners, success in school will depend on their ability to learn successfully the types of language skills involved in academic language development. There is an emerging knowledge base on how to reach this instructional goal.

One way to help develop academic language is by reinforcing verbal exchanges with written words. Having words available to read and re-read and use as a basis of stories generated by English-language learners with learning difficulties is a critically important technique. Echevarria and Graves (1998) described how this type of vocabulary instruction can be used in the classroom this way: "One form of vocabulary development includes short, explicit segments of class time in which the teacher directly teaches key vocabulary. These five minute segments consist of the teachers saying the vocabulary word, writing it on the board, asking students to say it and write it and defining the terms with pictures, demonstrations, and examples familiar to the students" (p. 220). Using this type of vocabulary instruction, Rousseau and colleagues (1993) found significant benefits on reading comprehension in a study with five sixth-grade students receiving special education services for language or learning disabilities.

Graphic organizers such as story maps build knowledge of academic language while enhancing comprehension. Reading stories in English and filling in the story maps (either individually with teacher support or working with a peer) is an effective way for English-language learners with learning difficulties to learn English. The permanence of maps and other visual organizers reduces the need to memorize and gives students an opportunity to understand and reflect on the structure of the new language as well as see the connections between concepts. More information about story maps is given in a later chapter.

7 Useful Initial Teaching Strategies

As teachers begin to develop instructional strategies that increase students' access to curriculum concepts, a few initial steps can help immensely in preparing the right kind of instructional environment. These initial steps are easily overlooked, yet if used correctly they provide an excellent starting point for meeting the learning needs of English-language learners with learning difficulties. We recommend the following practices:

- When students first enroll in school, it is helpful to provide them with a list of common school vocabulary and concepts. This will help orient new students to the school setting and give them a concrete way of independently checking and learning the meaning of important concepts. This list would include names of important people and places in the school, common verbs, and how to ask for help.

- Useful introductory activities have been implemented in many schools. For example, in one middle school, English-language learners with learning difficulties are paired with bilingual students, and together they study critical vocabulary and prepare an interview. This interview is conducted in English with a member of the school community. This information is then shared by the two students with the other students. In an elementary school, students tour the school with a teacher when they first arrive. Throughout the tour, the teacher takes Polaroid photos of important areas of the school and of school personnel (e.g., office, cafe-

teria, school nurse, secretary). These photos are used to create a map of the school that is labeled with words and the photos. The final product is displayed in the office for visitors to see.

In one secondary school, English-language learners with learning difficulties are paired with a "host" student for the first day of school. The host student introduces the English-language learner to school procedures, shows the location of important areas, and helps the English-language learner understand what life is like in the new school.

Incorporate the student's native language in materials and instructional strategies.

- Teachers can help students feel comfortable in a new school setting by incorporating students' native language in the materials and instructional strategies selected. For example, having some native-language books available that students can read, allowing students to use their native language to respond to questions or to demonstrate and express what they know, and allowing students to work in small groups using their native language can significantly increase the opportunities for English-language learners with learning difficulties to have meaningful access to curriculum concepts.

One teacher interviewed as part of this research expressed the importance of language in social interactions this way: "There is that certain click of understanding and interest that happens when you do speak their native language. But when I don't, then I make sure that . . . the environment is social enough and safe enough that children get what they need from each other, and not always just from me."

- Teachers who take the time to learn and use at least a few words in the student's native language are making a wise investment. These (frequently humbling) encounters with learning a second language, even if at a very basic level, demonstrate teacher interest and respect for the language and cultural background of the English-language learner.

One of the teachers in our focus group put it this way: "There were . . . teachers in my team who learned some Spanish in order to be able to teach a class and get their point across. They are not native speakers of the language. They have a different culture, different cultural background. The connection takes a little bit longer to be established, but the effort was well worth it."

- For teachers new to working with English-language learners with learning difficulties, it can be extremely beneficial to observe others who are successful with these students or who have been trained to work with them. Having mentor teachers model successful strategies emerged as a strong recommendation from our focus group discussions. Guides and videos featuring experienced teachers can also be useful, provided that new teachers have a chance to discuss the content.

One school district investigated as part of this research provides a mentoring program in which experienced ESL teachers are paired with new ESL or general education teachers. They spend one year sharing concerns, ideas, and suggestions, and also coach each other on specific teaching tasks in real classroom settings. The program also includes opportunities for English-language learners with learning difficulties to share with teachers their thoughts about learning English, including what they found most helpful and what they found most difficult or confusing.

8 What Teachers Can Do to Provide Meaningful Access to the General Curriculum

Several key instructional principles that can be used with English-language learners with learning difficulties are addressed in this book. In considering them, it is important to be aware of two common activities that are ineffective with English-language learners: (1) lengthy whole-class lectures devoid of visual aids or active student participation and (2) lengthy student seatwork.

- **Vocabulary instruction** is crucial for English-language development and can serve as a cornerstone for content-area learning. By *vocabulary instruction*, we do not mean memorizing the definitions of 20 new vocabulary terms each lesson. Rather, we refer to a range of instructional strategies that can be used to help English-language learners with learning difficulties acquire vocabulary. Such strategies include learning vocabulary in the context of mastering new concepts through literature discussions, student conversations, writing exercises, cooperative group activities, and semantic maps.

  For example, as in any subject area, knowing science vocabulary involves a complex process of constructing relations between ideas, terms, and meanings, in contrast to simply knowing definitions for a list of terms. Constructing these relations is complicated by the fact that terms often cannot be translated into another language, or do not exist in a comparable language form such as questioning or analyzing. In other words, some languages may use metaphors in contrast to analysis forms, such as hypothesis, to express complex ideas.

Monitor the pace of introducing language concepts.

- **Use of students' native language** can be an excellent means to support students' learning of concepts *even if the teacher does not speak the students' native language*. A student's native language use can be respected and fostered through the availability of books and other materials in the student's native language, and the availability of other individuals who speak that language, including teaching assistants, parents, local high school or university students, and peers.

- **Consistent language use** is very important, especially early in second-language learning. Teachers should be particularly thoughtful and consistent in the way they use language in the classroom. For example, synonyms, metaphors, similes, and idioms should be used carefully and purposefully. Verbal checks for student comprehension should be done frequently.

Teachers should also monitor their pace of introducing language concepts. For example, many fourth-grade teachers of native English speakers may see their role as one of providing models of the richness of the English language and will therefore use synonyms and metaphors as a means of demonstrating that richness. This same approach can be disastrous for English-language learners with learning difficulties, depending on their level of English proficiency. One general rule of thumb that evolved in our focus groups is to be extremely careful and consistent in language use when presenting a new concept and to use synonyms, similes, and metaphors primarily when *expanding on or reviewing a concept*. As students learn more English, the pace can increase, but this depends on the complexity of the content and other factors.

When students receive services from multiple support programs, a great deal of coordination among programs is required to maintain consistent language use.

Using clear, consistent language does not mean using childish language. We have seen teachers effectively use quite sophisticated terms such as "character clue" and "migration" with English-language learners with learning difficulties. However, these terms were visually displayed and clearly defined, with relevant examples provided.

Many students with academic difficulties receive additional services from a variety of support programs. For example, it is not uncommon for students with academic difficulties to receive language and academic support in regular education programs

such as ESL, Title I, or Migrant Tutorial and, if eligible, in special education programs for students with learning disabilities or speech and language impairments. Unless there is a high degree of coordination between these programs, the issue of consistent language use may be compromised, and instruction may in fact be less comprehensible than it might otherwise be.

- **Opportunities to speak and use language in a fashion that is linked to academic learning** is one of the most critical indicators of student academic engagement. This can involve paraphrasing, asking questions, and expressing ideas. It includes speaking in both English and the native language. Principles of cognitive science suggest that we learn by doing and receiving feedback on what we do. English-language learners with learning difficulties learn language (and how to use it) by verbalizing and receiving feedback.

One teacher we saw read to her fourth-grade class *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge*, an Australian story about a woman losing her memory. When asked what the story was about, a student answered, "It was kind of sad." The teacher asked the class, "How do you know?" and one boy, whom the teacher had described earlier as a student with learning difficulties, said, "Because old people." The response was very brief and had grammatical problems, but a perceptive teacher would recognize that this student had thought about the story in an intelligent and serious way. In many contexts, however, these kinds of responses by English-language learners with learning difficulties are interpreted as evidence of limited intelligence and learning potential. It is typically very difficult for teachers to assess English-language learners' academic capabilities because of the language barrier between students and teachers and because there is an uneven progress associated with learning content and a second language simultaneously. Although English-language learners with learning difficulties often lack fluency in expression, they have ideas to contribute and will do so in an accepting classroom environment.

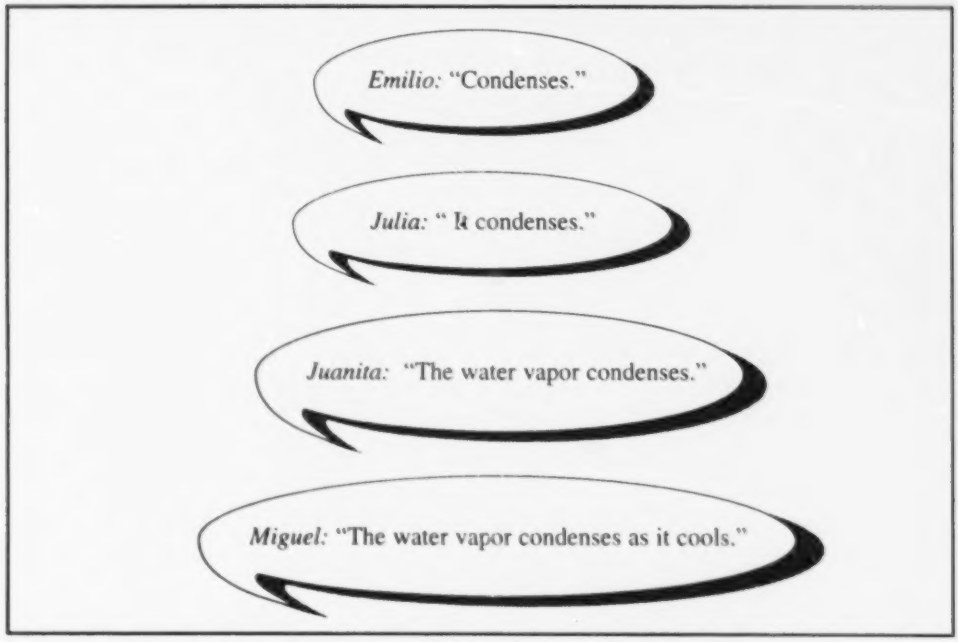
Although English-language learners may lack fluency, they have ideas to contribute in an accepting classroom environment.

The following example illustrates a seamless intersection that can occur between language development and content area learning when students are provided multiple opportunities to express

their ideas, scaffolded by teacher and peer responses. During a scaffolded discussion of evaporation and condensation of water, students responses "grew more comprehensive, moving from 'Condenses,' and 'It condenses,' to 'The water vapor condenses,' and then, 'The water vapor condenses as it cools.' After further discussion one student explained, 'The hot water in the bottom cup evaporated to the top cup, where water vapor cooled with the ice and condensed in little drops'" (Lee & Fradd, 1998, p. 18). Lee and Fradd (1998) described the interaction as movement from verb usage in the present tense without specified nouns and pronouns to more complete expression that includes adverbs, dependent clauses, and tense changes—or concurrent development of the discourse of literacy and the language of science. Figure 8.1 illustrates this language progression.

Figure 8.1

Example of the Language Progression of English-Language Learners in a Science Discussion Using Principles of Language-Sensitive Instruction on Student Responses



(*Note.* Developed by Gersten, Baker, and Marks for Lee & Fradd, 1998.)

Peers can be excellent mediators in helping to bridge language gaps between classroom teachers and English-language learners with learning difficulties. In essence, they can serve as unofficial teacher assistants. As we stated earlier, however, it is important to provide peers (and other helpers) with careful supervision and structure from the teacher. Close teacher supervision and direction help maximize the benefit to both the English-language learner and the peer mediator.

In an effort to speed up the process of learning English, some teachers and administrators do not allow students to use their native language when working with other students of the same language background. Yet, peer clarification in the native language can be extremely beneficial.

A "one size fits all" approach to classroom discussions can be problematic for a number of reasons. Each culture has its own conventions. These conventions can relate to the amount of talking that is considered appropriate during a lesson, the meaning of direct eye contact, and the volume of speech, to name just three of many potentially important examples. Some of the basic information about key cultural conventions can be learned through conversations with members of the community.

- **Visual aids** are an excellent way to help English-language learners with learning difficulties process information. The double demands of learning content and a second language are significant. Because the spoken word is fleeting, visual aids such as graphic organizers, concept and story maps, and word banks give students visual tools to process, reflect on, and organize information.

- **Ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of instructional activities in producing actual student learning** is important in ensuring that teaching methods are effective. Teachers can and should frequently assess the effects of instructional activities for all students through an array of measures. Ongoing curriculum-based assessments are a widely advocated approach to measure both English-language development and academic/cognitive growth. These measures can often be administered in the students' native language and/or in English, depending on the purpose of the assessment. Informal instructional assessments during the lesson are also an excellent way to probe and track, in a num-

ber of ways, what the students are getting out of lessons, discussions, practice, independent work, partner learning, or cooperative groups. These curriculum-based and informal assessments show teachers clearly what is being learned, so that they can provide responsive feedback and adjust teaching tactics. In addition, it is critical to be sensitive to possible effects of being tested in a second language. For example, Lee and Fradd suggested that often "by saying too much or too little, students may give the impression they do not understand, when they simply lack specific language or communication patterns to express precise meanings" (Lee & Fradd, 1998, p. 16).

- **Building home–school connections** has been noted as an important way to encourage English-language development. Parent involvement can be encouraged by making school a welcoming place for all parents. This can be accomplished by posting bilingual signs where possible, sending home bilingual notices and letters, and setting up situations where parents feel comfortable volunteering in the schools. Certainly, parents can help on field trips, and they can be invited to share their expertise in the classrooms.

The gap between home and school can be bridged, in part, through appropriate homework assignments. Be aware that many students have no one at home who can help them with homework assignments in English. It might be useful to provide writing or reading assignments that can be done in either language. Include explanations to parents regarding the nature of homework in the family's primary language. English-language learners with learning difficulties can also read a book they know well in English to parents even if the parents have limited English-language capabilities. This creates an opportunity for children to teach parents English and to show parents what they have learned.

9 Strategies That Build Comprehension and Other Language Abilities

Essentially, the suggestions for teaching strategies to increase access to curriculum concepts for English-language learners with learning difficulties involve (a) providing comprehensible input to students and (b) giving frequent opportunities to use language during instruction. The strategies and concepts in this section further elaborate how teachers can meet these important goals in their instructional practices.

Selecting Vocabulary: What Words Should Serve as the Focus of a Lesson?

The number of new vocabulary terms introduced to English-language learners with learning difficulties at any one time should be limited. A list of 20 new vocabulary words that students are expected to learn at one time is not an effective way to help English-language learners with learning difficulties develop vocabulary. Teachers in our focus groups recommended using lists of seven or fewer words that students would work on over several days. It is important that teachers have criteria for selecting words—such as choosing only words that convey key concepts, are of high utility, are relevant to the rest of the specific content being learned, and are meaningful to the lives of students. These suggestions may help students learn vocabulary words more effectively.

For example, one teacher we observed chose words that represented complex ideas for the entire class to analyze in depth—adjectives such as *anxious*, *generous*, and *suspicious* and nouns such as *memory*—words that English-language learners with

learning difficulties are likely to need help with. Later, this teacher had students—both native English speakers and English-language learners with learning difficulties—read a story and look for evidence that certain events pertained to these vocabulary words in relation to a particular character or incident. For example, students had to use three sources of information in the story to explain why they thought a character was *anxious*.

Selection of key vocabulary words is critical for literacy analysis. Words such as *anxious*, *memory*, and *persevere* can serve as important curriculum anchors for language and content learning. On the surface, some of these vocabulary words may seem too easy for fourth- or fifth-grade native English speakers. Yet the words are critical for second-language learners, and discussion of their meanings can go well beyond standard dictionary definitions. Moreover, the words have high utility, the potential both to link language learning and literature activities and to resonate with issues in students' lives.

Following is an example of a word list that presented problems for students. It is adapted from our observational research. At first glance, the teacher's intentions made sense: to create a list of words that students easily confused and words that were preventing them from understanding content. With this in mind, she created the following word list:

- then
- this
- that
- which
- weather
- the

Students were asked to use these words and write a story, with an interesting story starter provided: "The most terrible thing about the storm was . . . ." Yet students struggled with the assignment.

The problem with this word list is twofold. First, too many words that can be easily confused are taught at once, so the frustration level is likely to be high. Second, too many abstract words are introduced at once. Note that except for *weather*, none of the words are evocative. Simple words in English, presented in isolation, may become a source of confusion for beginning students for one reason or another. For example, the English words *in* and *on* translate in Spanish to *en*.

The following is a positive example of a vocabulary activity used with English-language learners with learning difficulties. The example comes from our research on effective instructional practices (Jiménez, Gersten, & Rivera, 1996). This 3-year study gave us an opportunity to observe many teachers of English-language learners. One fourth-grade teacher who was experienced in working with all students, particularly students with learning difficulties, frequently asked her students to write brief essays or poems using "word banks." The purpose of these activities is twofold: to improve vocabulary and to develop proficiency in writing.

For example, an activity in which students composed a special kind of poem called a *cinquain* helped build vocabulary and foster meaningful access to curriculum content for the English-language learners with learning difficulties in the classroom.

The activity consisted of three components. The teacher began by describing to students her reactions to a rainy day. She asked students to describe similar feelings and to name related vocabulary. The class created a word bank of potential English vocabulary to use in their poems. Some of these words were *rain*, *wet*, *cold*, *drops*, *thunder*, and *scare*. Next, the teacher gave students a format for writing a cinquain and explained its parts to them. She also modeled her own approach to writing a cinquain. She wrote the format on the board as shown in Figure 9.1. Finally, students were directed to write a cinquain. Examples of some of the student cinquains are presented in Figure 9.2.

Figure 9.1
Format for Writing a Cinquain

Writing a Cinquain:

_____
(topic)

_____ _____
(two adjectives)

_____ _____ _____
(three verbs)

_____
(a sentence showing feelings)

_____
(a synonym for the topic)

Figure 9.2
Examples of Cinquains Developed by English-Language Learners

Rain
wet, cold
drops, scares, crying
Water

Rain
Cool, Clear
Crazy, kick, hits
It makes me feel wild
Wet

Rain
Wet, Water
pretty, cool, crystal
You are so fun when you sprinkle
Wild Thunder

(*Note.* From Jiménez, Gersten, & Rivera, 1996. © University of Chicago Press. Reprinted with permission.)

The students were learning how to write poetry, an important and age-appropriate language arts skill, while they were building and solidifying their command of the English language. Although the amount of English the students needed to understand and use was confined to a defined framework, the range of potential involvement they could have with the language was limitless. *The activity had something for students who knew very little English as well as students who may have been fully proficient in English.* Finally, not only did the teacher provide the format students were to use in their poetry compositions, she also gave them an explicit model to follow.

Of course the success of the activity lies in how the students responded to it and what they learned from it. This particular teacher had a great deal of experience working with English-language learners with learning difficulties and drew on that experience in presenting this lesson. It seemed to work for all the students in her class. Even teachers new to working with English-language learners with learning difficulties can use this technique successfully and can extract from it important instructional principles.

Note that this exercise is a form of vocabulary instruction, but an interesting and engaging one. Vocabulary learning, a major theme in this book, should be one of the cornerstones of effective instructional practices with English-language learners with learning difficulties.

To help teachers select words for compiling word banks, Nagy and Herman (1985) presented a simple, but useful set of criteria. Also, some reading series and some state and local curriculum departments provide word lists to go along with novels commonly used in schools. However, remember that judicious use of these word lists is critical. As mentioned earlier and articulated by Nagy (1988), it is important that criteria for word selection be based on relevance for understanding key concepts, high utility, and relevance for students' lives. For example, in reading a short story, spending a lot of time on explaining what a "salt cellar" is may not be as essential as explaining what a "refugee" is. English-language learners with learning difficulties are not likely to have to understand what a salt cellar is for their future or immediate lives; however, understanding what a refugee is has more direct relevance for students' experiences; their use of the word may extend into understanding future conversations and events in their world.

What Are the Key Principles for Teaching Vocabulary?

- **Focus vocabulary instruction on a small number of critical words.** Teachers who are effective with English-language learners with learning difficulties do not drill students on lengthy word lists, even though districts or publishers usually encourage this practice. Rather, they focus on several critical words at a time and emphasize these for several days. When possible, teachers can also use short stories, below-grade-level books, and personal writing projects to amplify understanding of the concepts surrounding the vocabulary terms. These types of activities help establish the semantic networks that are critical to deep vocabulary learning and are the cornerstone of pioneering research on vocabulary instruction.

- **Provide multiple exposures.** Research has shown that students require multiple exposures to a new vocabulary term before

they are likely to have a basic understanding of the word's meaning. Additional exposures to the word in a variety of contexts are required before students begin to develop a deeper understanding of the word's meaning and use the word as part of their expressive vocabulary. Multiple exposures should also include a wide exposure to books.

- **Introduce new words before they are encountered in reading.** The time-tested practice of introducing new vocabulary prior to the reading of new stories can be especially helpful to English-language learners with learning difficulties (Rousseau et al., 1993). Echevarria (1998) described one method of making vocabulary instruction comprehensible for English-language learners with learning difficulties: "One form of vocabulary development includes short, explicit segments of a class time in which the teacher directly teaches key vocabulary. These five minute segments would consist of the teacher saying the vocabulary word, writing it on the board, asking students to say it and write it, and defining the term with pictures, demonstrations, and examples familiar to students" (p. 13).

- **Practice with new words.** Another important strategy for teaching vocabulary is to let students practice using new words. One example we observed was the teaching of the word *audience* in *Mr. Popper's Penguins*. After discussing the story and then teaching the definition of *audience*, the teacher encouraged her class to talk about other kinds of audiences. They discussed an audience at a Madonna concert, an audience at *Star Wars*, and an audience at a wrestling match. The activity became an occasion for even normally reticent students to experiment with expressing bits of their lives in English.

One of the problems English-language learners with learning difficulties often experience is retention of new words and concepts in their second language. Teachers often confuse stages of second-language acquisition with other learning difficulties. In second-language acquisition, students need adequate time and practice to go from having a rudimentary understanding of a word's meaning to being able to use that word appropriately in classroom conversation.

- **Focus on idioms.** Idioms can also play an important role in language and content learning for English-language learners with learning difficulties. However, their use with these learners can easily cause problems because the meaning of an idiom is typically much different than the sum of the words in the expression. Teachers can effectively use idioms to focus on differences between standard and contextual definitions of words, as well as to increase student comprehension. In other words, idioms can be an effective tool for teaching meaning.

Teachers may not be aware that many of the cognitive strategies or learning strategies (such as semantic maps and story maps) that they use successfully with native English-speaking students will also work with English-language learners with learning difficulties *provided they are modulated so that input is comprehensible*. A major purpose of this book is to assist in this process of learning how to modulate or adapt what works for native English-speaking students with and without learning difficulties for English-language learners.

- **Develop word banks**. As students learn new vocabulary words, these organizers should be added to a *word bank* that can be the "location" for what they have learned. The term is commonly used to indicate a place where key vocabulary is stored and posted for students' reference throughout the teaching of a unit or beyond. It is accumulated key vocabulary organized for specific purposes as in the example. Word banks were also used in the example cited earlier (Figure 9.2) in which students were writing poetry. The creation of word banks can be a group activity involving the contribution of many students, and it can become the source of lesson content over time. Words in the word bank should be important words, critical to the concepts students are learning.

Visually displayed word banks can be created on an ongoing basis. As evocative vocabulary is introduced, its meanings and key content attributes can be written on butcher paper, for example, and posted around the room. These word banks become reference points for students, helping them remember definitions and relationships between terms and serving as guides for correct spelling. Word banks can be dynamic. As students learn more about words and how they are used, this new information can be added to existing definitions.

How Do Visual Organizers Connect Language and Key Concepts in the Curriculum?

A recurrent refrain in the focus groups and in the emerging literature on effective instruction was the importance of using visuals and visual organizers as teaching tools (Chamot & O'Malley, 1996; Echevarria, 1998; Fitzgerald, 1995; Reyes & Bos, 1998). Visual organizers can help students access and understand concepts in a new language that they could not otherwise grasp if instruction were solely verbal.

Three examples of visual organizers that help English-language learners with learning difficulties learn important curriculum content are

- Semantic maps to enhance understanding of vocabulary concepts.
- Text structures to serve as a basis for writing.
- Story maps for comprehension and writing.

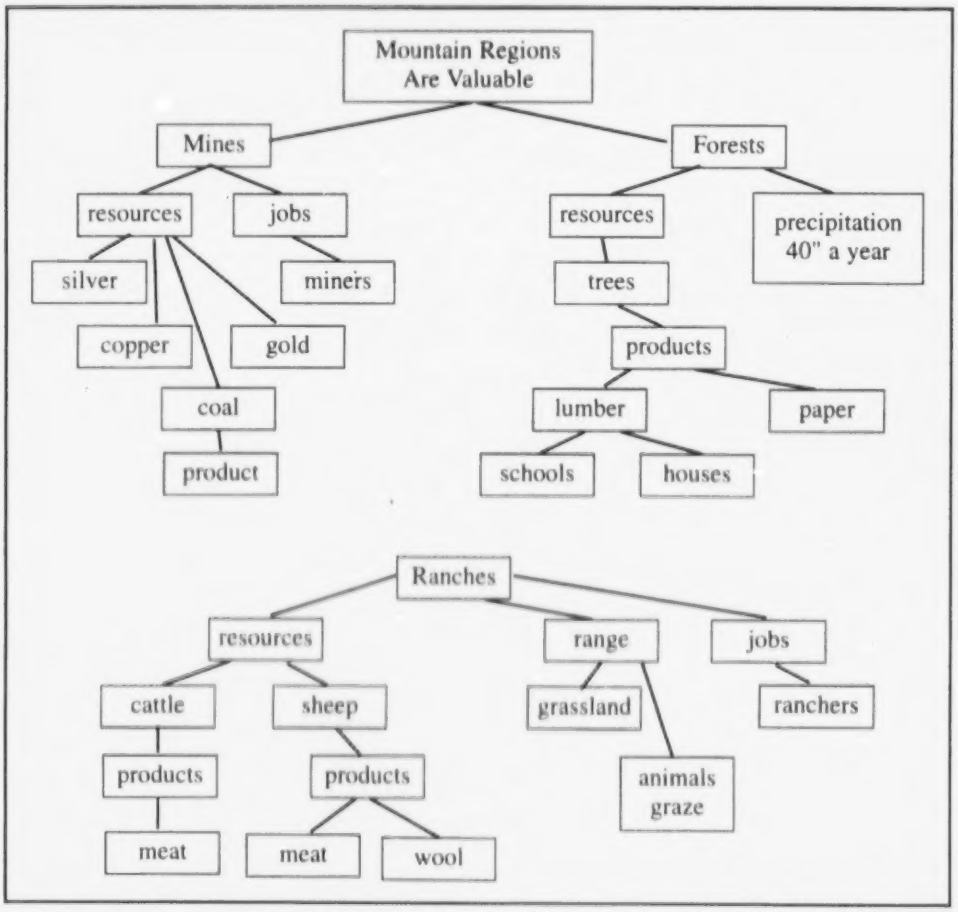
Teachers are more effective when they learn and integrate only one or two visual organizers into their teaching repertoire than when they are learning and using a wide array of organizers. Kline, Deshler, and Schumacker argued that each technique requires time for both students and teachers to feel comfortable with it and use it effectively (Kline, Deshler, & Schumacker, 1992).

How Can Semantic Maps Enhance Knowledge of Vocabulary Concepts?

Semantic maps are graphic depictions of the main ideas and concepts in a story or article and the relationship of these main ideas or concepts to each other and to other, more minor themes or concepts. These depictions help students organize information and see the interrelationship of key concepts. One model for teaching using a map or a web is presented in Figures 9.3 and 9.4.

Visual aids such as semantic maps can be used to help students with learning difficulties learn important vocabulary, verbalize relationships, organize ideas and concepts, provide examples, and learn from examples provided by others. One frequently used tactic is to list common objects by classification category (e.g., types of vehicles, types of foods) and discuss the concept or

Figure 9.3
Example of a Model for Teaching Using a Map or a Web



(*Note.* From Reyes & Bos, 1998, in Gersten & Jiménez, eds. © Wadsworth Publishing. Reprinted with permission.)

label that applies. More abstract concepts can also be categorized for English-language learners with learning difficulties. For example, lists of adjectives can be categorized as "words that describe" and then discussed.

Anderson and Roit (1996) provided a model of how to use visual organizers to help the vocabulary development of English-language learners with learning difficulties called *vocabulary networking*. They noted that a common problem with most semantic

Figure 9.4

Relationship Chart • Cuadro De Relaciones

Mountain Regions Are Valuable • El Valor de Los Regiones Montañosas

Key: - = related ? = undecided

Leyenda: - = relacionado ¿ = no puedo decidir

Important Places • Lugares Importantes

Important Ideas *Ideas Importantes*		*Mines* *Minas*	*Forests* *Bosques*	*Ranches* *Ranchos*
Resources *Recursos*	coal carbon			
	gold oro			
	silver plata			
	trees àrboles			
	fish peces			
	cattle ganado			
	sheep ovejas			
Product *Producto*	meat carne			
	wool lana			
	lumber madera			
	fuel combustible			
Recreation *Recreacion*	hiking cominatas			
	skiing esquiar			
	fishing pescar			
Jobs *Ocupaciones*	miners mineros			
	ranchers rancheros			

map or web activities is that they are often carried out as one-shot collective activities to which students do not return, or according to Campbell, Gersten, and Kolar (1993), they are done too infrequently to provide the consistency needed for English-language learners with learning difficulties. The three vocabulary networking techniques listed below focus on helping students develop and retain the understanding of word meanings and the relationships between words and concepts necessary for deep vocabulary knowledge (Beck, McKeown, & McCaslin, 1983). Vocabulary learning for all students depends on frequent exposures to words and their use in context. New words should be added to networks regularly. Introducing too many such words simultaneously, however, can cause confusion.

- The first recommendation is that a variety of semantic maps providing examples and nonexamples of key vocabulary concepts be kept on separate sheets in a reference notebook. Developing these semantic maps and sharing their ideas about words in this way not only increases students' understanding of particularly difficult words, but also provides a functional source of vocabulary ideas for writing. Students can return to their personal set of semantic maps to use when writing and reading. They can add to them and share them over time. It is critical that the teacher either frequently allow time or set a regular time for students to work with these vocabulary networks so that learning is reinforced.

- The second activity is best used with transition markers—abstract words such as *some*, *during*, *however*, and *except* that tend to heavily influence the meaning of content (Short, 1994). These words may be relatively simple for native English speakers, but they can be problematic for English-language learners. Textbooks are filled with transition markers. The following excerpt from *Exploring American History* illustrates the importance of these words for understanding content:

> Parliament passed a tax law called the Stamp Act . . . . *However* . . . . Parliament passed the Declaratory Act . . . . *Because* the British government still needed money, Parliament in 1767 passed the Township Acts . . . . The Townshend Acts caused more and more colonists to protest [italics added]. (O'Connor, 1991, pp. 186–187)

The transition marker words *however* and *because*, reinforce the concept that the colonists reacted to British actions in the

hope of changing the situation. Because these types of words can be difficult to understand, teaching students to understand these uses and the distinctions between them is particularly important.

One way for students to enhance and retain their understanding of transition marker words such as *because* and *however* is through a technique suggested by Anderson and Roit (1996). In this technique, students write these words at the top of blank sheets of paper. Under each word, students organize examples from texts read. For example, students can turn to a page listing five sentences from texts they have read using the word *because*. They can annotate these pages with personal notes or comments to help them remember.

- In the third technique, students create maps of related words that cut across texts in a particular domain, such as the *American West* or *species survival*. This helps increase awareness of how frequently words are used, which is beneficial to learning word meanings. Students can also color code words that are repeated frequently across texts and that are crucial to a certain domain. According to Hartman (1995), this activity not only increases vocabulary knowledge, but also fosters the intertextual awareness that is so characteristic of good readers.

The three techniques in this model help English-language learners develop vocabulary knowledge. The activities also promote cognitive development by focusing on superordinate and subordinate concepts (Anderson & Roit, 1996).

How Can Story Maps Enhance Comprehension?

Story maps are the visual representations of story grammar.

Most stories are structured in such a way that they are easily depicted with visual aids. Idol (1987) noted the potential of providing concrete representations of story structures for students with academic difficulties:

> The reader is instructed about interrelated components or parts of a story, which provides a basic framework that draws the reader's attention to the common elements among narrative stories. This increases the possibility of the reader searching his or her mind for possible information, searching the text for such information, and using the story map as a framework for drawing the two information sources together. (p. 197)

Typically, story grammar consists of five major elements: character, goal, obstacle, outcome, and theme. Story maps are the visual representations of this story grammar. There are slight variations in the story grammar elements listed, depending on the source, but the basic components are similar. A slightly different variation of this story grammar is presented in the map developed and described by Beck (1991) and presented in Figure 9.5.

It is important to note that students typically use story maps as organizers prior to reading, and then again after reading to fill in information and search the text for important information they did not get while reading the story. During the actual reading of the story, however, the story maps typically are not used, so that the flow of reading is not broken. After reading the story, students should complete the story map and, hopefully, begin to understand that successful reading involves much more than merely reading something through one time.

What is the KWL Procedure?

Moll's (1992) concept of "funds of knowledge" is useful for understanding the importance of drawing on the background experiences of English-language learners with learning difficulties in developing learning activities that help them achieve access to the general curriculum. Many strategies can be used to help access funds of knowledge, including use of the native language.

A visual organizer that can be used to access funds of knowledge and develop new learning is the Know-Want-to-know-Learned (KWL) grid. English-language learners come to school with a range of experiences and knowledge that they can share in the school context. When these sources of information are incorporated into instruction, students are able to personalize the information within familiar topics. This not only lowers the anxiety level often associated with language learning, but also increases comprehensible input, because students are able to relate the new concepts to their own personal experiences and interests. One way to help students access the knowledge they have about particular topics and themes is through the use of text structures as visual organizers. In the three-part sequence of developing a KWL, students:

Figure 9.5
Example of a Story Map

Purpose: To provide literary essentials such as the main characters, the setting, the problem, the major events, the problem's solution, and the theme for a story.

Grade Levels: Regular and less prepared students in grades K–8.

Description: A Story Map helps students glean essential data from a story. In this activity, students complete the Story Map as a whole class or reading group in primary grades, writing the required information in the space provided. Middle and upper grade students can fill in the outline on their own. Less prepared students may need assistance with ideas and procedures. Some guidance in deciding the main events in the story may be necessary, or students may include too many facts. Students need to learn to combine like events, give them a broader title, then proceed. In completing the Story Map, students should first listen to the entire story, if it is being read aloud. If they are reading the story or a book in parts or segments, they should complete the assigned portion prior to filling in the Story Map. Otherwise, they will lose the thread of the story or interrupt its flow by stopping to insert data in the Story Map. The completed Story Map provides much material for discussion or writing, whichever is most appropriate for the literary selection being used.

Sample Story Map for *Molly's Pilgrim*, by Barbara Cohen

Setting/main characters: Home and School, Molly, Mama, Miss Stickley, Elizabeth

Statement of the problem: The other children laugh at and make fun of Molly.

Event 1	The children tease Molly.
Event 2	The class has to make Pilgrim clothespin dolls.
Event 3	Mama makes Molly's doll look like herself.
Event 4	The children laugh at Molly's doll because it doesn't look like a Pilgrim.
Event 5	The teacher tells about modern Pilgrims and the Jewish holiday that inspired Thanksgiving.

Statement of the solution: The children understand about Molly and decide to be friends with her.

Story Theme (What is this story really *about?):*
People are different, but when you get to know them, you often like them.

(*Note.* From Beck, 1991, in Bacon, Bewell, & Vogt, eds. © International Reading Association. Reprinted with permission.)

1. List what they know about a topic.
2. List what else they would like to know about a topic.
3. After reading, list what they learned about a topic.

Figure 9.6 is an example of a KWL completed by a group of students about the Great Depression. The KWL promotes language use by giving students an opportunity to identify verbally what they know about a topic and what they would like to know. The KWL activity motivates students to draw on their background knowledge when they encounter new information. It also helps them assume responsibility for their own learning, which should increase their motivation to learn.

KLW promotes language use and motivates students to draw on their background knowledge.

Finally, the diversity of the individual sheets means that many different ideas will be available to promote interesting classroom discussions. Discussions will be lively because students have had a great deal of choice in what to focus on, which increases their interest in discussing the topic with their peers.

In fact, the real purpose of KWL is to give students the opportunity to share their knowledge and ask questions. These questions will focus the students as they explore topics related to the core concept. According to Ogle (1986), the students' questions provide ownership and commitment that guide learning. Tapping prior knowledge and using student-generated questions as key activities will increase students' conceptual knowledge.

A good way to begin using the KWL visual organizer is as a group activity. The main concept is introduced by writing it on the board, on an overhead, or on butcher paper. Students begin by sharing information they know or think they know about the topic. The teacher records this information so that students can see it. To encourage participation, the teacher does not evaluate students' statements, and all responses are recorded regardless of accuracy.

After all ideas have been recorded in the "Know" column, the teacher asks the students what they want to know or find out about the topic. To stimulate participation, the teacher will model questions that will help students formulate their own questions. All questions are recorded in the "Want to Know" column.

Next, the teacher explains that the class will confirm or amend information in the "Know" column of the KWL grid and answer questions from the "Want to Know" column as they

Figure 9.6
Example of KWL Visual Organizer

K	W	L
What we know about The Great Depression	*What we want to know about The Great Depression*	*What we learned about The Great Depression*
1000s went hungry	How people got food	Caused by stock market crash of 1929
1000s without jobs	Was it caused from the crash of 1929?	Tariffs up
Stock market went down	How were the upper-class people affected?	Banks and people in debt
Lots of famines	Who was president?	Rich and middle class became poorer
National balance of money: off balance	Why did it happen?	Hoover dude was president
During a war		
Happened for 6–7 years		
Start of the "Baby Boom"		

progress through the unit of study. This will be an interactive, recursive process in which students will be drawing information from the textbook, supplemental readings, guest speakers, and films. Periodically, answers to the students' questions will be recorded in the "Learned" column of the KWL grid. Students can then use the map or chart as a study tool and as a guide for writing summaries of the content.

How Can Visual Organizers Help Students Organize Their Ideas?

Comparison/Contrast

Text structure refers to the ways in which people organize ideas in the text to develop arguments and defend positions. In addition to narrative text structure, other common text structures include comparison/contrast and problem–solution–effect. Text structure can be depicted usefully through visual aids to help English-language learners "see" ideas and the connections between concepts and to document important recurring content themes. An example of a text structure organizer is presented in Figure 9.7.

Figure 9.7
Example of a Text Structure Organizer

Comparison/Contrast Organizational Form

What is being compared/contrasted?

Radish and broccoli

On what?

Color

Alike?	Different?
Both have green.	Broccoli is all green. Radishes have some red.

On what?

How it feels

Alike?	Different?
	Broccoli is bumpy. Radishes are smooth.

On what?

Size

Alike?	Different?
	Broccoli is big. Radishes are little.

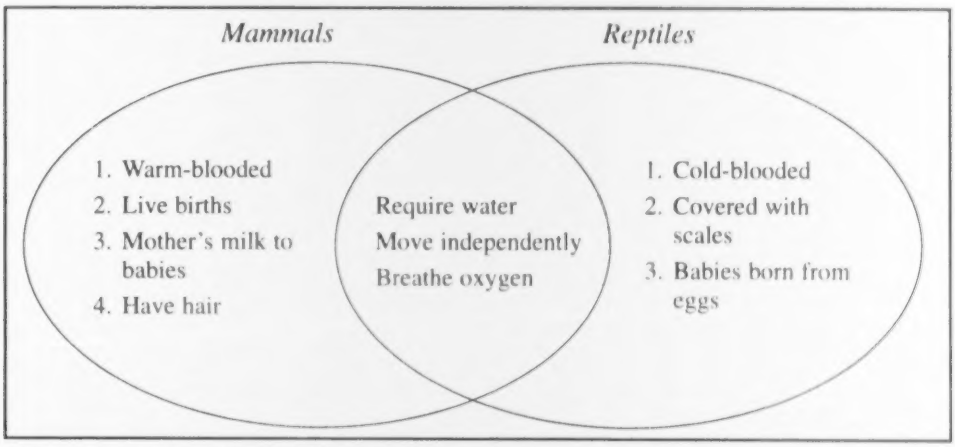
This text structure organizer, from Englert, Raphael, and Anderson (1992), shows how one student used the visual organizer in a text structure using a comparison/contrast format as a first step in preparing a story she was writing. This organizer has been used effectively with native English speakers as well as English-language learners. What makes it potentially very useful for English-language learners is that it does not require complex reading strategies to understand, the content is important and grade appropriate, and students can actually use the organizer to write or speak from. Notice that on the organizer, spelling, grammar, and other writing conventions are not emphasized. The focus is on organizing text for understanding and composing.

The Venn Diagram is another way to visually depict the comparison/contrast text structure. Venn diagrams help students organize similarities and differences between two topics. Originally used in mathematics to visually describe sets of numbers, Venn diagrams are also useful in organizing thoughts in other subject areas. An example of a Venn diagram comparing mammals and reptiles is shown in Figure 9.8 (Echevarria, 1998). The differences are listed in the circles on the left and right sides. The similarities are listed in the overlapping section of the circles.

Problem–Solution–Effect

A popular and versatile text structure is problem–solution–effect (PSE). This text structure is used extensively in subjects such as history that lend themselves to sequences of events and social interactions. For example, issues associated with the Great Depression and the rise of Nazism lend themselves well to PSE maps. These maps are also excellent ways to help English-language learners and other students see problems from a variety of perspectives. For example, they can view the American Revolution from both a British and the colonists' perspective (see Figure 9.9), view the New Deal from the position of an unemployed worker and a bank president, and view the current peace process in Israel from an Arab and a Jewish perspective.

Figure 9.8
A Venn Diagram Comparison of Mammals to Reptiles



(*Note.* From Echevarria (1998). Used with permission.)

Figure 9.9 is an example of a PSE map that might be used to help students understand the causes of the American revolution. Note how the structure provides some support for the students so they can complete the map. As students read their textbooks and try to understand what they read, they should be able to develop

Figure 9.9
Example of a Problem-Attempted Solution-Effect Concept Map and Phrase Bank

Colonists' Problem	*Colonists' Attempted Solutions*	*Effects on Colonists*
I am a colonist. I do not want to pay taxes to the British government because . . . 1. 2. 3.		

British Problem	*British Attempted Solutions*	*Effects on British*
I am a British citizen. The colonists should pay taxes to the British government because . . . 1. 2. 3.		

Phrase/Idea Bank
I am not represented in the British government.
The money from the taxes does not benefit the colonies.
The British government needs money to maintain the navy.
The British government needs money to maintain the country.
The Stamp Act
The Intolerable Acts
The Boston Tea Party

this map to depict the revolution from both the colonists' and the British perspectives.

On the bottom of the example, is an "idea bank" that can be developed in conjunction with the PSE map. Generating an idea bank may be useful with students who have difficulty accessing information by giving them the structure for developing a list of important ideas with which they can attempt to reason out their positions. Idea banks are especially useful with English-language learners because they reduce the extent to which students have to rely on their memory of information and details, giving them a better opportunity to reason out a position, explain their choices, and explain the overall effects of the historical period.

Summary

Visuals can help encourage English-language learners with learning difficulties to try out language expressions, express complex thoughts in a new language, and ask questions. Even short phrases and expressions can represent higher-order thinking. Maps and other visual organizers not only help English-language learners express these complex thoughts and ideas, but they also provide some of the support needed for native English speakers to understand what English-language learners are expressing and thus promote interactive dialog. These types of dialogs are at the heart of efforts to promote cognitive/academic language proficiency.

10 Key Instructional Principles

The following critical instructional principles emerged from our focus groups on working with English-language learners.

Teacher "Think Alouds" and Modeling Can Improve Second Language Acquisition

Demonstrating the activities and the strategies being taught provides students with a model for completing assignments or applying the strategies. For English-language learners, step-by-step modeling of what needs to be done and presenting examples of completed assignments or projects are essential. Following are some ways teachers can provide this support:

- Use "think-alouds." Talk out your strategy for tackling the instructional task (e.g., "I'll read the paragraph first. Then I'll reread it to look for the answer to the first question . . . . I'll underline where I think the answer is."). Share the learning strategy, including labeling, explaining why it was chosen, and telling students why that particular strategy might be helpful to them. Encourage students also to use think-alouds.
- Present numerous examples of concepts being taught.
- Show visual examples of a finished assignment as you verbally explain the steps for completing it (use the overhead projector or chalkboard to keep everyone together).

- Check for understanding by asking students to repeat or model the instructions and steps presented *before* having students complete the assignment independently. At first, ask simple yes/no questions to check for understanding; then more complicated instructions and questions (which include "who," "what," "why," "when," and "how") can be interspersed as language acquisition increases. Even though these types of questions are more difficult, because they tend to be more thought provoking than questions that have short, factual answers, they should be included in these instructional dialogs even if the English-language learner is just beginning to develop English proficiency. It is important to remember that lack of English fluency does not mean English-language learners cannot participate in tasks requiring complex thinking skills.

Concrete Examples and Experiences Increase Student Understanding of Concepts

Concrete examples and experiences can make input more comprehensible for English-language learners with learning difficulties. These include visuals, computer software, CD roms, films, field trips, science experiments, and cooperative learning activities to make the presentation more meaningful. These additions to classroom instruction can enhance and give students a variety of ways of understanding the information being presented, rather than always receiving the information via lecture and verbal explanations. It is important for teachers to keep in mind that they should:

- Use materials and subject matter that relate to the students' background experiences and interests.
- Allow students to share information and personal experiences in their native language.
- Support the oral presentation of lessons (i.e., lectures) with a variety of visuals and intersperse these with opportunities for students to participate in hands-on activities.

Teachers Need to Use Consistent Language in Communicating Complex Concepts

For English-language learners with learning difficulties, listening to a teacher's explanations or lectures can be confusing if the teacher uses many idioms, synonyms, or metaphors. Many words and phrases may not be familiar to these students, and using a range of similar words to convey the same essential concept can make learning difficult. The main point for teachers is *to be aware of their language use*. Of course idioms, synonyms, and metaphors are part of dynamic, rich instruction, and they should be included as long as students are given adequate explanations for these words. In using these types of words, it is important for the teacher to be aware of the language levels of the students in the classroom. In addition, it is important to be aware of appropriate times to use them. For example, frequent use of synonyms when introducing a new concept is not recommended; however, when reinforcing or expanding ideas, the use of synonyms can help build language concepts and vocabulary.

Teachers Must Balance Cognitive and Language Demands During Instruction

A balance also needs to be struck between the dual demands on English-language learners with learning difficulties to simultaneously push for complex language and cognitive learning. For example, effective teachers intentionally and carefully reduce the cognitive demands on students when the primary goal is to encourage English-language expression (either written or oral). When the cognitive task is inherently demanding (e.g., a new science concept or complex literary content such as character clues), effective teachers allow and encourage students to use a variety of supports, including the native language. One effective technique is to preview information and the core vocabulary in the native language. After the English presentation and practice activities, reviewing and checking for comprehension in English and the native language help determine levels of learning and retention.

This intentional balance may be one of the most essential instructional practices for English-language learners experiencing academic difficulties.

Students Need Appropriate Feedback on Their English-Language Mistakes

Providing feedback and correction varies with the language development and age of students. In the beginning stages of English-language learning, it is important for the teacher to model correct usage and to be sensitive, providing feedback on concepts and ideas rather than always correcting student grammar. However, during later stages of English-language learning, it is important that the teacher identify grammatical errors and provide specific feedback to students.

Sufficient Time Should Be Allocated for English-Language Learning

... English-language learners need opportunities to use [English] to obtain what they want or to express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas.

Adequate instructional time for English-language learning should be established. However, this does not mean there needs to be a separate time for English-language instruction. Instead, English-language learning can be integrated into content areas. Some of the teachers and administrators who participated in the focus groups noted that sheltered instruction frameworks sometimes run the risk of focusing so much on content that English-language learning is unduly compromised. Consequently, they felt that teachers need to have clear, focused times when the goal is to build students' English-language skills. For example, if the focus is on content-based English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), there must be adequate time to acquire both conversational and written skills.

It is important to set aside time for English-language *acquisition* as well as English-language *learning*. *Acquisition* involves opportunities for English-language learners to practice speaking in the new language to develop fluency and proficiency. It is sometimes thought of as the subconscious process of learning language that mimics the process we go through when acquiring our first language. English-language *learning* implies learning *new* English-language skills. This is the more conscious process which has to do with knowing about the language (Krashen, 1982). English-language learning can be done through academic content; acquisition can be done through opportunities to engage in conversations, interactions, and discussions. A writer's workshop can be a good medium for language acquisition.

It is important to ensure that students have sufficient opportunities to use academic language actively, especially in oral discourse. Learning environments should be structured so that students have many opportunities to use language beyond single-word answers and short phrases. For example, rather than answering questions that have correct and incorrect answers, English-language learners should be given opportunities to explain information in their own words, summarize the meaning of new information, explain why they believe certain content is important, and talk about what they liked best or found most interesting about a particular lesson. Class-wide peer tutoring activities seem to provide an excellent framework for helping students actively participate in structured academic discussions.

Peers Can Promote Language Use, Language Development, and Understanding of Complex Curriculum Content

English-language learners with learning difficulties must be given opportunities to move from learning and producing limited word translations and fragmented concepts to using longer sentences and expressing more complex ideas and feelings (Barrera, 1984). Many educators have been trained to help students break complex concepts into small steps, assessing frequently whether students understand and can execute each of the steps, and using redundant language and physical gestures as prompts.

The task of encouraging students to express their ideas in a new language, and in increasingly complex forms, presents a significant challenge for general education teachers working with English-language learners. A more natural, fluid learning environment is necessary for language development. According to Fradd (1987), English-language learners need frequent opportunities to use language to obtain what they want, or to express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. The teacher's role in these activities is to create a classroom atmosphere in which students are encouraged to express what they are thinking and how they are doing.

Two promising strategies for providing opportunities to use language during instruction are cooperative learning groups and classwide peer tutoring (Arreaga-Meyer, 1998). Use of coopera-

tive learning groups with English-language learners provides many potentially positive benefits, such as:

- Creating opportunities to use language in a meaningful and nonthreatening fashion (Bace & Cervantes, 1989; McGroarty, 1989).
- Drawing on primary language skills while developing second language skills, especially if other English-language learners work together (McGroarty, 1989).
- Promoting higher-order cognitive and linguistic discourse (Garcia, 1992).
- Fostering peer modeling and peer feedback rather than formal and often embarrassing error-correction procedures.

All participants in the focus groups conducted as part of this investigation noted the benefits of using cooperative learning and classwide peer tutoring strategies, especially for English-language learners. Small cooperative groups allow students to interact with peers while working on schoolwork assignments. However, it was noted that *adequate structure and purpose* are necessary for students to benefit from these kinds of activities. In fact, the experienced teachers in our focus groups suggested that it takes at least 1 academic year to learn to organize and manage cooperative learning groups efficiently and effectively. Many times, students needed a great deal of assistance in developing the organizational skills necessary to run cooperative groups efficiently. It also is important for teachers to spend a good deal of front-end time explaining and modeling how students are expected to tutor or work cooperatively. While students work in cooperative groups or peer tutoring teams, teachers need to institute processes to ensure that students keep focused on the purpose of the activities.

In schools that have used cooperative groups, Dianda, Madden, and Slavin (1993) noted that "studies of schools and classrooms where [English-language learners] have been particularly successful academically report that individual instructional activities and individual competition among students were limited . . . . Classrooms were lively and even noisy environments in which students collaborated with each other in small groups to complete assignments" (p. 5).

Current Policy Related to English-Language Learners

Current federal policy requires that districts teaching English-language learners must address these students' needs for both proficiency in English and academic achievement. Where a formal program is required to meet the needs of English-language learners, districts must provide instruction in English that is based on practices that are recognized as sound by experts in the field. Of equal importance, schools need to provide English-language learners with meaningful access to the general curriculum. Schools may choose to address the two aspects of teaching English and the general curriculum concurrently or sequentially. No matter how it is accomplished, the key is that schools are responsible for providing English-language learners the opportunity to acquire full proficiency in English (reading, writing, speaking, and understanding) and to achieve high academic standards. (Readers should also refer to a publication by the Office for Civil Rights titled *The Provision of an Equal Education Opportunity to Limited English Proficient Students*) (U.S. Department of Education, 1992).

Federal policy intentionally does not specify either the means of teaching proficiency in English or the language of instruction that should be used in the classroom. Rather, the policy provides for flexibility in how these dual goals are met. A means of addressing both aspects of instructional need might include a combination of native-language instruction, instruction in ESOL or English as a Second Language (ESL), and sheltered content instruction. Whatever the strategy used, federal policy requires that districts monitor the success of the program and modify it as necessary to ensure the success of all English-language learners.

Some things are clearly perceived as poor practice under new and previous federal policy because they would be considered a gross neglect of an English-language learner's instructional needs. For example, merely providing an English-language learner with a grade-level science text written in English with no additional support is not acceptable practice. Providing a fifth-grade English-language learner with a remedial second-grade curriculum that provides minimal cognitively challenging content is not appropriate.

Long-range planning in schools is essential for quality services.

Providing an individual in the classroom who speaks the English-language learner's native language also does not guarantee that curriculum concepts are being taught adequately. Ultimately, it is the classroom teacher's responsibility to ensure that English-language learners, regardless of their level of English-language proficiency, are in fact receiving appropriate access to the curriculum. It is the district's responsibility to ensure that adequate procedures are in place to provide the training and ongoing support that classroom teachers need to monitor the learning of their English-language learners.

There is a lack of long-range planning in many schools. Although there is no specific legal provision regarding long-range goals for students without disabilities (as there is for students with disabilities), long-range planning is essential for provision of high-quality services. In the focus groups conducted by the authors, one theme that recurred frequently was the lack of long-range planning for English-language learners. Many times, even in districts with experience working with English-language learners, there is a tendency to deal with each problematic situation by "putting out the fire." However, it is critically important for districts and schools that are going to work with English-language learners to think through clearly what they hope to accomplish over the long term, and how they can best get there.

To do this, teachers and other professionals at a school need to meet and determine where, academically, they would like to see each student in a 2- or 3-year period. Planning such as this can be a worthwhile experience that benefits students and the professionals who serve them. It can help prioritize instructional focus areas and goals, and it can give parents input in determining instructional programs they believe are best for their child.

Also, long-range planning gives schools the opportunity to learn about variations in the rates of student cognitive growth over time. In particular, it is important for schools to understand that the pace of growth will differ between students; even for an individual student, academic growth is not necessarily a consistent, linear process over time. However, meaningful growth should occur for every student, and effective long-range planning must include procedures to determine whether sufficient progress is taking place.

Review of Key Instructional Principles

- Remember that vocabulary instruction is crucial for English-language development.
- Use clear, consistent language when introducing new concepts.
- Provide numerous opportunities for the student to speak and use English in academic and social settings with teachers and peers.
- Use visual aids and graphic organizers during instruction.
- Tailor feedback to fit the student's response and/or errors.
- Systematically build background knowledge starting with what students bring to school.
- Recognize the difference between language development in conversational language and in complex academic language, and include both types of learning activities.
- Provide a balanced approach to language development that includes all three traditional approaches—emphasis on grammar and syntax, conversation, and academic or decontextualized language.

(List adapted from Gersten & Jiménez, 1994.)

Vocabulary Concepts as Curriculum Anchors

- Focus vocabulary instruction on a small number of critical words.
- Give students multiple exposures to new vocabulary.
- Give students many opportunities to practice orally and in writing using new words.
- Help students organize new vocabulary using word banks, semantic maps, webs, and other tools.
- Introduce new vocabulary words before they are encountered in reading.

Instructional Strategies

- Present multiple examples of concepts.
- Show visual examples of finished assignments as you verbally explain.

- Use think-alouds; that is, talk through your strategy for tackling the instructional tasks.
- Encourage students to think aloud.
- Provide concrete examples and experiences to help the student better understand the concepts being presented.

Instructional Principle

- Allocate adequate time for English-language learning.
- Balance cognitive and language demands during instruction.
- Use consistent language to communicate complex concepts.
- Use peers to promote language use, language development, and understanding of complex curriculum by employing cooperative learning groups and class-wide peer tutoring.

Suggested Readings

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